

Necessary Labour(s): Doing the Work of Undoing

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Abstract

Necessary Labour(s): Doing the work of undoing, plenary session with Salad Hilowle, Katarina Pirak Sikku and Temi Odumosu, recorded on November 18th, 2021 as a part of the PARSE 4th biennial research conference on Violence.

Sweden's colonial archives are sites of documented histories with unacknowledged narratives of violence. The repository of photographs and documents require radical re-examination through decolonial perspectives to make visible those memories and experiences that have been occluded, or to offer reparative possibilities. Katarina Pirak Sikku's research in the State Institute for Racial Biology archive at Uppsala University is revealed in careful gestures honours Sami ancestors and family members. Salad Hilowle's production of *Vanus Labor* (2021), an installation and short film featured in GIBCA 2021, intercepts the colonial gaze by revisiting the production of European Art history and its reproduction of African subjects. The plenary addresses how these two artists have strategically worked at undoing the colonial archive through decolonial labour. By using artistic methods with archival material and subverting their status as official records in national (and international) discourse – these artistic practices are necessary interventions to the singularity of colonial histories that make possible acts of remembrance in histories otherwise not seen.—

With an introduction by Jyoti Mistry.

Introduction

Swedish artists Salad Hilowle and Katarina Pirak Sikku engage in conversation with curator and scholar Temi Odumosu on their respective practices. The conversation highlights their unique ways of working with the archive, in which they foreground elided histories that challenge the ideological discourse of Swedish homogeneity.



Francis Nelme. Pair of George II Figural Candlesticks, 1730. Silver. Portland Art Museum, USA. 2012.82.1a,b

Odumuso sets into motion the significance of (re)reading archival traces by introducing an object she found in a museum collection: a set of two silver candle stands. In each, a kneeling black child holds the candle on its head, a neck shackle connected to its ankle. An everyday object, beautiful in its technical craftsmanship, is disarming in the banality of its violence. The discussion initiates a series of speculations: the conditions of production, the occasions on which it may have been used and the possible responses (or lack thereof) of its presence on a dinner table.

Hilowle and Pirak Sikku take turns in sharing their findings in an art archive and the Race Biology Institute respectively. Each artist describes their process of working with traces found in the archive in pursuit of reclaiming Black and Sami experiences that have not been visible in Swedish society, let alone Swedish history. The conversation is steered towards the necessity for dialogue through the artworks, and the fine line between the ethical responsibility of representing these histories but insisting on the need to find some level of autonomy in the representations they wish to explore. In addition, they describe the need for care in research and the sustainability of their artistic practices while ensuring self-care to maintain their own emotional mettle. Odumuso invites participants to pose questions to the artists that open up to reflections on the materiality of the mediums they choose to work with, their consideration of audiences and the significance of the contexts of circulation of their respective artworks.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

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